



MOUFFLOU AND OTHER STORIES

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Ouida, pseud.

Moufflou and other stories

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MOUFFLOU AND OTHER STORIES

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THEY PLAY WITH MOUFFLOU AND THE POODLE PUPPY HALF THE DAY

MOUFFLOU

AND OTHER STORIES

BY
LOUISA DE LA RAMÉ
(OUIDA)

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR BY
MARIA L. KIRK
AND PEN DRAWINGS BY
EDMUND H. GARRETT



PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
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MOUFFLOU

MOUFFLOU

MOUFFLOU'S masters were some boys and girls. They were very poor, but they were very merry. They lived in an old, dark, tumble-down place, and their father had been dead five years; their mother's care was all they knew; and Tasso was the eldest of them all, a lad of nearly twenty, and he was so kind, so good, so laborious, so cheerful, and so gentle, that the children all younger than he adored him. Tasso was a gardener. Tasso, however, though the eldest and mainly the bread-winner, was not so much Moufflou's master as was little Romolo, who was only ten, and a cripple. Romolo, called generally Lolo, had taught Moufflou all he knew, and that all was a very great deal, for nothing cleverer than was Moufflou had ever walked upon four legs.

Why Moufflou?

Well, when the poodle had been given to them by a soldier who was going back to his home in Piedmont, he had been a white woolly creature of a year old, and the children's mother, who was a Corsican by birth, had said that he was just

like a *moufflon*, as they call sheep in Corsica. White and woolly this dog remained, and he became the handsomest and biggest poodle in all the city, and the corruption of Moufflou from Moufflon remained the name by which he was known; it was silly, perhaps, but it suited him and the children, and Moufflou he was.

They lived in an old quarter of Florence, in that picturesque zigzag which goes round the grand church of Or San Michele, and which is almost more Venetian than Tuscan in its mingling of color, charm, stateliness, popular confusion, and architectural majesty. The tall old houses are weather-beaten into the most delicious hues; the pavement is enchantingly encumbered with peddlers and stalls and all kinds of trades going on in the open air, in that bright, merry, beautiful Italian custom which, alas, alas! is being driven away by new-fangled laws which deem it better for the people to be stuffed up in close, stewing rooms without air, and would fain do away with all the good-tempered politics and the sensible philosophies and the wholesome chatter which the open-street trades and street gossipry encourage, for it is good for the populace to *sfogare* and in no other way can it do so one-half so innocently. Drive it back into musty

shops, and it is driven at once to mutter sedition.

. . . But you want to hear about Moufflou.

Well, Moufflou lived here in that high house with the sign of the lamb in wrought iron, which shows it was once a warehouse of the old guild of the *Arte della Lana*. They are all old houses here, drawn round about that grand church which I called once, and will call again, like a mighty casket of oxidized silver. A mighty casket indeed, holding the Holy Spirit within it; and with the vermilion and the blue and the orange glowing in its niches and its lunettes like enamels, and its statues of the apostles strong and noble, like the times in which they were created,—St. Peter with his keys, and St. Mark with his open book, and St. George leaning on his sword, and others also, solemn and austere as they, austere though benign, for do they not guard the White Tabernacle of Orcagna within?

The church stands firm as a rock, square as a fortress of stone, and the winds and the waters of the skies may beat about it as they will, they have no power to disturb its sublime repose. Sometimes I think of all the noble things in all our Italy; Or San Michele is the noblest, standing there in its stern magnificence, amidst people's hurrying feet and noisy laughter, a memory of God.

The little masters of Moufflou lived right in its shadow, where the bridge of stone spans the space between the houses and the church high in mid-air: and little Lolo loved the church with a great love. He loved it in the morning-time, when the sunbeams turned it into dusky gold and jasper; he loved it in the evening-time, when the lights of its altars glimmered in the dark, and the scent of its incense came out in the street; he loved it in the great feasts, when the huge clusters of lilies were borne inside it; he loved it in the solemn nights of winter; the flickering gleam of the dull lamps shone on the robes of an apostle, or the sculpture of a shield, or the glow of a casement-moulding in majolica. He loved it always, and, without knowing why, he called it *la mia chiesa*.

Lolo, being lame and of delicate health, was not enabled to go to school or to work, though he wove the straw covering of wine-flasks and plaited the cane matting with busy fingers. But for the most part he did as he liked, and spent most of his time sitting on the parapet of Or San Michele, watching the venders of earthenware at their trucks, or trotting with his crutch (and he could trot a good many miles when he chose) out with Moufflou down a bit of the Stock-

ing-makers' Street, along under the arcades of the Uffizi, and so over the Jewellers' Bridge, and out by byways that he knew into the fields on the hill-side upon the other bank of Arno. Moufflou and he would spend half the day—all the day—out there in daffodil-time; and Lolo would come home with great bundles and sheaves of golden flowers, and he and Moufflou were happy.

His mother never liked to say a harsh word to Lolo, for he was lame through her fault: she had let him fall in his babyhood, and the mischief had been done to his hip never again to be undone. So she never raised her voice to him, though she did often to the others,—to curly-pated Cecco, and pretty black-eyed Dina, and saucy Bice, and sturdy Beppo, and even to the good, manly, hard-working Tasso. Tasso was the mainstay of the whole, though he was but a gardener's lad, working in the green Cascine at small wages. But all he earned he brought home to his mother; and he alone kept in order the lazy, high-tempered Sandro, and he alone kept in check Bice's love of finery, and he alone could with shrewdness and care make both ends meet and put *minestra* always in the pot and bread always in the cupboard.

When his mother thought, as she thought indeed almost ceaselessly, that with a few months he would be of the age to draw his number, and might draw a high one and be taken from her for three years, the poor soul believed her very heart would burst and break; and many a day at twilight she would start out unperceived and creep into the great church and pour her soul forth in supplication before the White Tabernacle.

Yet, pray as she would, no miracle could happen to make Tasso free of military service: if he drew a fatal number, go he must, even though he take all the lives of them to their ruin with him.

One morning Lolo sat as usual on the parapet of the church, Moufflou beside him. It was a brilliant morning in September. The men at the hand-barrows and at the stalls were selling the crockery, the silk handkerchiefs, and the straw hats which form the staple of the commerce that goes on round about Or San Michele,—very blithe, good-natured, gay commerce, for the most part, not got through, however, of course, without bawling and screaming, and shouting and gesticulating, as if the sale of a penny pipkin or a twopenny pie-pan were the occasion for the

exchange of many thousands of pounds sterling and cause for the whole world's commotion. It was about eleven o'clock; the poor petitioners were going in for alms to the house of the fraternity of San Giovanni Battista; the barber at the corner was shaving a big man with a cloth tucked about his chin, and his chair set well out on the pavement; the sellers of the pipkins and pie-pans were screaming till they were hoarse, "*Un soldo l'uno, due soldi tre!*" big bronze bells were booming till they seemed to clang right up to the deep-blue sky; some brethren of the Misericordia went by bearing a black bier; a large sheaf of glowing flowers—dahlias, zinnias, asters, and daturas—was borne through the huge arched door of the church near St. Mark and his open book. Lolo looked on at it all, and so did Moufflou, and a stranger looked at them as he left the church.

"You have a handsome poodle there, my little man," he said to Lolo, in a foreigner's too distinct and careful Italian.

"Moufflou is beautiful," said Lolo, with pride. "You should see him when he is just washed; but we can only wash him on Sundays, because then Tasso is at home."

"How old is your dog?"

“Three years old.”

“Does he do any tricks?”

“Does he!” said Lolo, with a very derisive laugh: “Why, Moufflou can do anything! He can walk on two legs ever so long; make ready, present, and fire; die; waltz; beg, of course; shut a door; make a wheelbarrow of himself; there is nothing he will not do. Would you like to see him do something?”

“Very much,” said the foreigner.

To Moufflou and to Lolo the street was the same thing as home; this cheery *piazzetta* by the church, so utterly empty sometimes, and sometimes so noisy and crowded, was but the wider threshold of their home to both the poodle and the child.

So there, under the lofty and stately walls of the old church, Lolo put Moufflou through his exercises. They were second nature to Moufflou, as to most poodles. He had inherited his address at them from clever parents, and, as he had never been frightened or coerced, all his lessons and acquirements were but play to him. He acquitted himself admirably and the crockery-venders came and looked on, and a sacristan came out of the church and smiled, and the barber left his customer's chin all in a lather while he

laughed, for the good folk of the quarter were all proud of Moufflou and never tired of him, and the pleasant, easy-going, good-humored disposition of the Tuscan populace is so far removed from the stupid buckram and whalebone in which the new-fangled democracy wants to imprison it.

The stranger also was much diverted by Moufflou's talents, and said, half aloud, "How this clever dog would amuse poor Victor! Would you bring your poodle to please a sick child I have at home?" he said, quite aloud, to Lolo, who smiled and answered that he would. Where was the sick child?

"At the Gran Bretagna; not far off," said the gentleman. "Come this afternoon, and ask for me by this name."

He dropped his card and a couple of francs into Lolo's hand, and went his way. Lolo, with Moufflou scampering after him, dashed into his own house, and stumped up the stairs, his crutch making a terrible noise on the stone.

"Mother, mother! see what I have got because Moufflou did his tricks," he shouted. "And now you can buy those shoes you want so much, and the coffee that you miss so of a morning, and the new linen for Tasso, and the shirts for Sandro."

For to the mind of Lolo two francs was as two millions—source unfathomable of riches inexhaustible!

With the afternoon he and Moufflou trotted down the arcades of the Uffizi and down the Lung' Arno to the hotel of the stranger, and, showing the stranger's card, which Lolo could not read, they were shown at once into a great chamber, all gilding and fresco and velvet furniture.

But Lolo, being a little Florentine, was never troubled by externals, or daunted by mere sofas and chairs; he stood and looked around him with perfect composure; and Moufflou, whose attitude, when he was not romping, was always one of magisterial gravity, sat on his haunches and did the same.

Soon the foreigner he had seen in the forenoon entered and spoke to him, and led him into another chamber, where stretched on a couch was a little wan-faced boy about seven years old; a pretty boy, but so pallid, so wasted, so helpless. This poor little boy was heir to a great name and a great fortune, but all the science in the world could not make him strong enough to run about among the daisies, or able to draw a single breath without pain. A feeble smile lit up his face as he saw Moufflou and Lolo; then a shadow chased it away.



MOUFFLOU ACQUITTED HIMSELF ABLY AS EVER.

“Little boy is lame like me,” he said, in a tongue Lolo did not understand.

“Yes, but he is a strong little boy, and can move about, as perhaps the sons of his country will make you do,” said the gentleman, who was the poor little boy’s father. “He has brought you his poodle to amuse you. What a handsome dog! is it not?”

“Oh, *buffins!*” said the poor little fellow, stretching out his wasted hands to Moufflou, who submitted his leonine crest to the caress.

Then Lolo went through the performance, and Moufflou acquitted himself ably as ever; and the little invalid laughed and shouted with his tiny thin voice, and enjoyed it all immensely, and rained cakes and biscuits on both the poodle and its master. Lolo crumped the pastries with willing white teeth, and Moufflou did no less. Then they got up to go, and the sick child on the couch burst into fretful lamentations and outcries.

“I want the dog! I will have the dog!” was all he kept repeating.

But Lolo did not know what he said, and was only sorry to see him so unhappy.

“You shall have the dog to-morrow,” said the gentleman, to pacify his little son; and he

hurried Lolo and Moufflou out of the room, and consigned them to a servant, having given Lolo five francs this time.

"Why, Moufflou," said Lolo, with a chuckle of delight, "if we could find a foreigner every day, we could eat meat at supper, Moufflou, and go to the theatre every evening!"

And he and his crutch clattered home with great eagerness and excitement, and Moufflou trotted on his four frilled feet, the blue bow with which Bice had tied up his curls on the top of his head, fluttering in the wind. But, alas! even his five francs could bring no comfort at home. He found his whole family wailing and mourning in utterly inconsolable distress.

Tasso had drawn his number that morning, and the number was seven, and he must go and be a conscript for three years.

The poor young man stood in the midst of his weeping brothers and sisters, with his mother leaning against his shoulder, and down his own brown cheeks the tears were falling. He must go, and lose his place in the public gardens, and leave his people to starve as they might, and be put in a tomfool's jacket, and drafted off among cursing and swearing and strange faces, friendless, homeless, miserable! And the mother,—what would become of the mother?

Tasso was the best of lads and the mildest. He was quite happy sweeping up the leaves in the long alleys of the Cascine, or mowing the green lawns under the ilex avenues, and coming home at supper-time among the merry little people and the good woman that he loved. He was quite contented; he wanted nothing, only to be let alone; and they would not let him alone. They would haul him away to put a heavy musket in his hand and a heavy knapsack on his back, and drill him, and curse him, and make him into a human target, a live popinjay.

No one had any heed for Lolo and his five francs, and Moufflou, understanding that some great sorrow had fallen on his friends, sat down and lifted up his voice and howled.

Tasso must go away!—that was all they understood. For three long years they must go without the sight of his face, the aid of his strength, the pleasure of his smile: Tasso must go! When Lolo understood the calamity that had befallen them, he gathered Moufflou up against his breast, and sat down, too, on the floor beside him and cried as if he would never stop crying.

There was no help for it: it was one of those misfortunes which are, as we say in Italian, like

a tile tumbled on the head. The tile drops from a height, and the poor head bows under the unseen blow. That is all.

“What is the use of that?” said the mother, passionately, when Lolo showed her his five francs. “It will not buy Tasso’s discharge.”

Lolo felt that his mother was cruel and unjust, and crept to bed with Moufflou. Moufflou always slept on Lolo’s feet.

The next morning Lolo got up before sunrise, and he and Moufflou accompanied Tasso to his work in the Cascine.

Lolo loved his brother, and clung to every moment whilst they could still be together.

“Can nothing keep you, ‘Tasso?’” he said, despairingly, as they went down the leafy aisles, whilst the Arno water was growing golden as the sun rose.

Tasso sighed.

“Nothing, dear. Unless Gesù would send me a thousand francs to buy a substitute.”

And he knew he might as well have said, “If one could coin gold ducats out of the sunbeams on Arno water.”

Lolo was very sorrowful as he lay on the grass in the meadow where Tasso was at work, and the poodle lay stretched beside him.

When Lolo went home to dinner (Tasso took his wrapped in a handkerchief) he found his mother very agitated and excited. She was laughing one moment, crying the next. She was passionate and peevish, tender and jocose by turns; there was something forced and feverish about her which the children felt but did not comprehend. She was a woman of not very much intelligence, and she had a secret, and she carried it ill, and knew not what to do with it; but they could not tell that. They only felt a vague sense of disturbance and timidity at her unwonted manner.

The meal over (it was only bean-soup, and that is soon eaten), the mother said sharply to Lolo, "Your aunt Anita wants you this afternoon. She has to go out, and you are needed to stay with the children: be off with you."

Lolo was an obedient child; he took his hat and jumped up as quickly as his halting hip would let him. He called Moufflou, who was asleep.

"Leave the dog," said his mother, sharply. "'Nita will not have him messing and carrying mud about her nice clean rooms. She told me so. Leave him, I say."

"Leave Moufflou!" echoed Lolo, for never in

all Moufflou's life had Lolo parted from him. Leave Moufflou! He stared open-eyed and open-mouthed at his mother. What could have come to her?

"Leave him, I say," she repeated, more sharply than ever. "Must I speak twice to my own children? Be off with you, and leave the dog, I say."

And she clutched Moufflou by his long silky mane and dragged him backwards, whilst with the other hand she thrust out of the door Lolo and Bice.

Lolo began to hammer with his crutch at the door thus closed on him; but Bice coaxed and entreated him.

"Poor mother has been so worried about Tasso," she pleaded. "And what harm can come to Moufflou? And I do think he was tired, Lolo; the Cascine is a long way; and it is quite true that Aunt 'Nita never liked him."

So by one means and another she coaxed her brother away; and they went almost in silence to where their aunt Anita dwelt, which was across the river, near the dark-red bell-shaped dome of Santa Spirito.

It was true that her aunt had wanted them to mind her room and her babies whilst she was

away carrying home some lace to a villa outside the Roman gate, for she was a lace-washer and clear-starcher by trade. There they had to stay in the little dark room with the two babies, with nothing to amuse the time except the clang of the bells of the church of the Holy Spirit, and the voices of the lemonade-sellers shouting in the street below. Aunt Anita did not get back till it was more than dusk, and the two children trotted homeward hand in hand, Lolo's leg dragging itself painfully along, for without Moufflou's white figure dancing on before him he felt very tired indeed. It was pitch dark when they got to Or San Michele, and the lamps burned dully.

Lolo stumped up the stairs wearily, with a vague, dull fear at his small heart.

"Moufflou, Moufflou!" he called. Where was Moufflou? Always at the first sound of his crutch the poodle came flying towards him. "Moufflou, Moufflou!" he called all the way up the long, dark twisting stone stair. He pushed open the door, and he called again, "Moufflou, Moufflou!"

But no dog answered to his call.

"Mother, where is Moufflou?" he asked, staring with blinking, dazzled eyes into the oil-lit room where his mother sat knitting. Tasso was not then home from work. His mother went on

with her knitting; there was an uneasy look on her face.

“Mother, what have you done with Moufflou, *my* Moufflou?” said Lolo, with a look that was almost stern on his ten-year-old face.

Then his mother, without looking up and moving her knitting-needles very rapidly, said,—

“Moufflou is sold!”

And little Dina, who was a quick, pert child, cried, with a shrill voice,—

“Mother has sold him for a thousand francs to the foreign gentleman.”

“Sold him!”

Lolo grew white and grew cold as ice; he stammered, threw up his hands over his head, gasped a little for breath, then fell down in a dead swoon, his poor useless limb doubled under him.

When Tasso came home that sad night and found his little brother shivering, moaning, and half delirious, and when he heard what had been done, he was sorely grieved.

“Oh, mother, how could you do it?” he cried. “Poor, poor Moufflou! and Lolo loves him so!”

“I have got the money,” said his mother, feverishly, “and you will not need to go for a soldier: we can buy your substitute. What is

a poodle, that you mourn about it? We can get another poodle for Lolo.”

“Another will not be Moufflou,” said Tasso, and yet was seized with such a frantic happiness himself at the knowledge that he would not need go to the army, that he, too, felt as if he were drunk on new wine, and had not the heart to rebuke his mother.

“A thousand francs!” he muttered; “a thousand francs! *Dio mio!* Who could ever have fancied anybody would have given such a price for a common white poodle? One would think the gentleman had bought the church and the tabernacle!”

“Fools and their money are soon parted,” said his mother, with cross contempt.

It was true: she had sold Moufflou.

The English gentleman had called on her while Lolo and the dog had been in the Cascine, and had said that he was desirous of buying the poodle, which had so diverted his sick child that the little invalid would not be comforted unless he possessed it. Now, at any other time the good woman would have sturdily refused any idea of selling Moufflou; but that morning the thousand francs which would buy Tasso’s substitute were forever in her mind and before her eyes.

When she heard the foreigner her heart gave a great leap, and her head swam giddily, and she thought, in a spasm of longing—if she could get those thousand francs! But though she was so dizzy and so upset she retained her grip on her native Florentine shrewdness. She said nothing of her need of the money; not a syllable of her sore distress. On the contrary, she was coy and wary, affected great reluctance to part with her pet, invented a great offer made for him by a director of a circus, and finally let fall a hint that less than a thousand francs she could never take for poor Moufflou.

The gentleman assented with so much willingness to the price that she instantly regretted not having asked double. He told her that if she would take the poodle that afternoon to his hotel the money should be paid to her; so she despatched her children after their noonday meal in various directions, and herself took Moufflou to his doom. She could not believe her senses when ten hundred-franc notes were put into her hand. She scrawled her signature, Rosina Calabucci, to a formal receipt, and went away, leaving Moufflou in his new owner's rooms, and hearing his howls and moans pursue her all the way down the staircase and out into the air.

She was not easy at what she had done.

“It seemed,” she said to herself, “like selling a Christian.”

But then to keep her eldest son at home—what a joy that was! On the whole, she cried so and laughed so as she went down the Lung’ Arno that once or twice people looked at her, thinking her out of her senses, and a guard spoke to her angrily.

Meanwhile, Lolo was sick and delirious with grief. Twenty times he got out of his bed and screamed to be allowed to go with Moufflou, and twenty times his mother and his brothers put him back again and held him down and tried in vain to quiet him.

The child was beside himself with misery. “Moufflou! Moufflou!” he sobbed at every moment; and by night he was in a raging fever, and when his mother, frightened, ran in and called in the doctor of the quarter, that worthy shook his head and said something as to a shock of the nervous system, and muttered a long word—“meningitis.”

Lolo took a hatred to the sight of Tasso, and thrust him away, and his mother, too.

“It is for you Moufflou is sold,” he said, with his little teeth and hands tight clinched.

After a day or two Tasso felt as if he could not bear his life, and went down to the hotel to see if the foreign gentleman would allow him to have Moufflou back for half an hour to quiet his little brother by a sight of him. But at the hotel he was told that the *Milord Inglese* who had bought the dog of Rosina Calabucci had gone that same night of the purchase to Rome, to Naples, to Palermo, *chi sa?*

“And Moufflou with him?” asked Tasso.

“The *barbone* he had bought went with him,” said the porter of the hotel. “Such a beast! Howling, shrieking, raging all the day, and all the paint scratched off the *salon* door.”

Poor Moufflou! Tasso’s heart was heavy as he heard of that sad helpless misery of their bartered favorite and friend.

“What matter?” said his mother, fiercely, when he told her. “A dog is a dog. Thy will feed him better than we could. In a week he will have forgotten—*chè!*”

But Tasso feared that Moufflou would not forget. Lolo certainly would not. The doctor came to the bedside twice a day, and ice and water were kept on the aching hot little head that had got the malady with the long name, and for the chief part of the time Lolo lay quiet, dull, and

stupid, breathing heavily, and then at intervals cried and sobbed and shrieked hysterically for Moufflou.

"Can you not get what he calls for to quiet him with a sight of it?" said the doctor. But that was not possible, and poor Rosina covered her head with her apron and felt a guilty creature.

"Still, you will not go to the army," she said to Tasso, clinging to that immense joy for her consolation. "Only think! we can pay Guido Squarcione to go for you. He always said he would go if anybody would pay him. Oh, my Tasso, surely to keep you is worth a dog's life!"

"And Lolo's?" said Tasso, gloomily. "Nay, mother, it works ill to meddle too much with fate. I drew my number; I was bound to go. Heaven would have made it up to you somehow."

"Heaven sent me the foreigner; the Madonna's own self sent him to ease a mother's pain," said Rosina, rapidly and angrily. "There are the thousand francs safe to hand in the *cassone*, and what, pray, is it we miss? Only a dog like a sheep, that brought gallons of mud in with him every time it rained, and ate as much as any one of you."

"But Lolo?" said Tasso, under his breath.

His mother was so irritated and so tormented

by her own conscience that she upset all the cabbage broth into the burning charcoal.

“Lolo was always a little fool, thinking of nothing but the church and the dog and nasty field-flowers,” she said, angrily. “I humored him ever too much because of the hurt to his hip, and so—and so——”

Then the poor soul made matters worse by dropping her tears into the saucepan, and fanning the charcoal so furiously that the flame caught her fan of cane-leaves, and would have burned her arm had not Tasso been there.

“You are my prop and safety always. Who would not have done what I did? Not Santa Felicita herself,” she said, with a great sob.

But all this did not cure poor Lolo.

The days and the weeks of the golden autumn weather passed away, and he was always in danger, and the small close room where he slept with Sandro and Beppo and Tasso was not one to cure such an illness as had now beset him. Tasso went to his work with a sick heart in the Cascine, where the colchicum was all lilac among the meadow grass, and the ashes and elms were taking their first flush of the coming autumnal change. He did not think Lolo would ever get well, and the good lad felt as if he had been the murderer of his little brother.

True, he had had no hand or voice in the sale of Moufflou, but Moufflou had been sold for his sake. It made him feel half guilty, very unhappy, quite unworthy of all the sacrifice that had been made for him. "Nobody should meddle with fate," thought Tasso, who knew his grandfather had died in San Bonifazio because he had driven himself mad over the dream-book trying to get lucky numbers for the lottery and become a rich man at a stroke.

It was rapture, indeed, to know that he was free of the army for a time at least, that he might go on undisturbed at his healthful labor, and get a raise in wages as time went on, and dwell in peace with his family, and perhaps—perhaps in time earn enough to marry pretty flaxen-haired Biondina, the daughter of the barber in the piazzeta. It was rapture indeed; but then poor Moufflou!—and poor, poor Lolo! Tasso felt as if he had bought his own exemption by seeing his little brother and the good dog torn in pieces and buried alive for his service.

And where was poor Moufflou?

Gone far away somewhere south in the hurrying, screeching, vomiting, braying train that it made Tasso giddy only to look at as it rushed by the green meadows beyond the Cascine on its way to the sea.

“If he could see the dog he cries so for, it might save him,” said the doctor, who stood with a grave face watching Lolo.

But that was beyond any one’s power. No one could tell where Moufflou was. He might be carried away to England, to France, to Russia, to America—who could say? They did not know where his purchaser had gone. Moufflou even might be dead.

The poor mother, when the doctor said that, went and looked at the ten hundred-franc notes that were once like angels’ faces to her, and said to them,—

“Oh, you children of Satan, why did you tempt me? I sold the poor, innocent, trustful beast to get you, and now my child is dying!”

Her eldest son would stay at home, indeed; but if this little lame one died! Rosina Calabucci would have given up the notes and consented never to own five francs in her life if only she could have gone back over the time and kept Moufflou, and seen his little master running out with him into the sunshine.

More than a month went by, and Lolo lay in the same state, his yellow hair shorn, his eyes dilated and yet stupid, life kept in him by a spoonful of milk, a lump of ice, a drink of lemon-

water; always muttering, when he spoke at all. "Moufflou, Moufflou, *dov' è Moufflou?*" and lying for days together in somnolence and unconsciousness, with the fire eating at his brain and the weight lying on it like a stone.

The neighbors were kind, and brought fruit and the like, and sat up with him, and chattered so all at once in one continuous brawl that they were enough in themselves to kill him, for such is ever the Italian fashion of sympathy in all illness.

But Lolo did not get well, did not even seem to see the light at all, or to distinguish any sounds around him; and the doctor in plain words told Rosina Calabucci that her little boy must die. Die, and the church so near? She could not believe it. Could St. Mark, and St. George, and the rest that he had loved so do nothing for him? No, said the doctor, they could do nothing; the dog might do something, since the brain had so fastened on that one idea; but then they had sold the dog.

"Yes; I sold him!" said the poor mother, breaking into floods of remorseful tears.

So at last the end drew so nigh that one twilight time the priest came out of the great arched door that is next St. Mark, with the Host uplifted, and a little acolyte ringing the bell before

it, and passed across the piazzetta, and went up the dark staircase of Rosina's dwelling, and passed through the weeping, terrified children, and went to the bedside of Lolo.

Lolo was unconscious, but the holy man touched his little body and limbs with the sacred oil, and prayed over him, and then stood sorrowful with bowed head.

Lolo had had his first communion in the summer, and in his preparation for it had shown an intelligence and devoutness that had won the priest's gentle heart.

Standing there, the holy man commended the innocent soul to God. It was the last service to be rendered to him save that very last of all when the funeral office should be read above his little grave among the millions of nameless dead at the sepulchres of the poor at Trebbiano.

All was still as the priest's voice ceased; only the sobs of the mother and of the children broke the stillness as they kneeled; the hand of Biondina had stolen into Tasso's.

Suddenly, there was a loud scuffling noise; hurrying feet came patter, patter, patter up the stairs; a ball of mud and dust flew over the heads of the kneeling figures, fleet as the wind Moufflou dashed through the room and leaped upon the bed.

Lolo opened his heavy eyes, and a sudden light of consciousness gleamed in them like a sunbeam. "Moufflou!" he murmured, in his little thin faint voice. The dog pressed close to his breast and kissed his wasted face.

Moufflou was come home!

And Lolo came home too, for death let go its hold upon him. Little by little, very faintly and flickeringly and very uncertainly at the first, life returned to the poor little body, and reason to the tormented, heated little brain. Moufflou was his physician; Moufflou, who, himself a skeleton under his matted curls, would not stir from his side and looked at him all day long with two beaming brown eyes full of unutterable love.

Lolo was happy; he asked no questions,—was too weak, indeed, even to wonder. He had Moufflou—that was enough.

Alas! though they dared not say so in his hearing, it was not enough for his elders. His mother and Tasso knew that the poodle had been sold and paid for; that they could lay no claim to keep him; and that almost certainly his purchaser would seek him out and assert his indisputable right to him. And then how would Lolo ever bear that second parting?—Lolo, so weak that he weighed no more than if he had been a little bird.

Moufflou had, no doubt, travelled a long distance and suffered much. He was but skin and bone; he bore the marks of blows and kicks; his once silken hair was all discolored and matted; he had, no doubt, travelled far. But then his purchaser would be sure to ask for him, soon or late, at his old home; and then? Well, then if they did not give him up themselves, the law would make them.

Rosina Calabucci and Tasso, though they dared say nothing before any of the children, felt their hearts in their mouths at every step on the stair, and the first interrogation of Tasso every evening when he came from his work was, "Has any one come for Moufflou?" For ten days no one came, and their first terrors lulled a little.

On the eleventh morning, a feast-day, on which Tasso was not going to his labors in the Cascine, there came a person, with a foreign look, who said the words they so much dreaded to hear: "Has the poodle that you sold to an English gentleman come back to you?"

Yes: his English master claimed him!

The servant said that they had missed the dog in Rome a few days after buying him and taking him there; that he had been searched for

in vain, and that his master had thought it possible the animal might have found his way back to his old home: there had been stories of such wonderful sagacity in dogs: anyhow, he had sent for him on the chance; he was himself back on the Lung' Arno. The servant pulled from his pocket a chain, and said his orders were to take the poodle away at once: the little sick gentleman had fretted very much about his loss.

Tasso heard in a very agony of despair. To take Moufflou away now would be to kill Lolo,—Lolo so feeble still, so unable to understand, so passionately alive to every sight and sound of Moufflou, lying for hours together motionless with his hand buried in the poodle's curls, saying nothing, only smiling now and then, and murmuring a word or two in Moufflou's ear.

"The dog did come home," said Tasso, at length, in a low voice; "angels must have shown him the road, poor beast! From Rome! Only to think of it, from Rome! And he a dumb thing! I tell you he is here, honestly: so will you not trust me just so far as this? Will you let me go with you and speak to the English lord before you take the dog away? I have a little brother sorely ill——"

He could not speak more, for tears that choked his voice.

At last the messenger agreed so far as this. Tasso might go first and see the master, but he would stay here and have a care they did not spirit the dog away,—“for a thousand francs were paid for him,” added the man, “and a dog that can come all the way from Rome by itself must be an uncanny creature.”

Tasso thanked him, went up-stairs, was thankful that his mother was at mass and could not dispute with him, took the ten hundred-franc notes from the old oak *cassone*, and with them in his breast-pocket walked out into the air. He was but a poor working lad, but he had made up his mind to do an heroic deed, for self-sacrifice is always heroic. He went straightway to the hotel where the English *milord* was, and when he had got there remembered that still he did not know the name of Moufflou’s owner; but the people of the hotel knew him as Rosina Calabucci’s son, and guessed what he wanted, and said the gentleman who had lost the poodle was within up-stairs and they would tell him.

Tasso waited some half-hour with his heart beating sorely against the packet of hundred-franc notes. At last he was beckoned up-stairs, and there he saw a foreigner with a mild fair face, and a very lovely lady and a delicate child

who was lying on a couch. "Moufflou! Where is Moufflou?" cried the little child, impatiently, as he saw the youth enter.

Tasso took his hat off, and stood in the doorway an embrowned, healthy, not ungraceful figure, in his working-clothes of rough blue stuff.

"If you please, most illustrious," he stammered, "poor Moufflou has come home."

The child gave a cry of delight; the gentleman and lady one of wonder. Come home! All the way from Rome!

"Yes, he has, most illustrious," said Tasso, gaining courage and eloquence; "and now I want to beg something of you. We are poor, and I drew a bad number, and it was for that my mother sold Moufflou. For myself, I did not know anything of it; but she thought she would buy my substitute, and of course she could; but Moufflou is come home, and my little brother Lolo, the little boy your most illustrious first saw playing with the poodle, fell ill of the grief of losing Moufflou, and for a month has lain saying nothing sensible, but only calling for the dog, and my old grandfather died of worrying himself mad over the lottery numbers, and Lolo was so near dying that the Blessed Host had been brought, and the holy oil had been put on him, when all at once there

rushes in Moufflou, skin and bone, and covered with mud, and at the sight of him Lolo comes back to his senses, and that is now ten days ago, and though Lolo is still as weak as a new-born thing, he is always sensible, and takes what we give him to eat, and lies always looking at Moufflou, and smiling, and saying, 'Moufflou! Moufflou!' and, most illustrious, I know well you have bought the dog, and the law is with you, and by the law you claim it; but I thought perhaps, as Lolo loves him so, you would let us keep the dog, and would take back the thousand francs, and myself I will go and be a soldier, and heaven will take care of them all somehow."

Then Tasso, having said all this in one breathless, monotonous recitative, took the thousand francs out of his breast-pocket and held them out timidly towards the foreign gentleman, who motioned them aside and stood silent.

"Did you understand, Victor," he said, at last, to his little son.

The child hid his face in his cushions.

"Yes, I did understand something: let Lolo keep him; Moufflou was not happy with me."

But he burst out crying as he said it.

Moufflou had run away from him.

Moufflou had never loved him, for all his sweet

cakes and fond caresses and platefuls of delicate savory meats. Moufflou had run away and found his own road over two hundred miles and more to go back to some little hungry children, who never had enough to eat themselves, and so, certainly, could never give enough to eat to the dog. Poor little boy! He was so rich and so pampered and so powerful, and yet he could never make Moufflou love him!

Tasso, who understood nothing that was said, laid the ten hundred-franc notes down on a table near him.

“If you would take them, most illustrious, and give me back what my mother wrote when she sold Moufflou,” he said, timidly, “I would pray for you night and day, and Lolo would too; and as for the dog, we will get a puppy and train him for your little *signorino*; they can all do tricks, more or less, it comes by nature; and as for me, I will go to the army willingly; it is not right to interfere with fate; my old grandfather died mad because he would try to be a rich man, by dreaming about it and pulling destiny by the ears, as if she were a kicking mule; only, I do pray of you, do not take away Moufflou. And to think he trotted all those miles and miles, and you carried him by train, too, and he never could

have seen the road, and he has no power of speech to ask——”

Tasso broke down again in his eloquence, and drew the back of his hand across his wet eyelashes.

The English gentleman was not altogether unmoved.

“Poor faithful dog!” he said, with a sigh. “I am afraid we were very cruel to him, meaning to be kind. No; we will not claim him, and I do not think you should go for a soldier; you seem so good a lad, and your mother must need you. Keep the money, my boy, and in payment you shall train up the puppy you talk of, and bring him to my little boy. I will come and see your mother and Lolo to-morrow. All the way from Rome! What wonderful sagacity! what matchless fidelity!”

You can imagine, without any telling of mine, the joy that reigned in Moufflou’s home when Tasso returned thither with the money and the good tidings both. His substitute was bought without a day’s delay, and Lolo rapidly recovered. As for Moufflou, he could never tell them his troubles, his wanderings, his difficulties, his perils; he could never tell them by what miraculous knowledge he had found his way across Italy,

from the gates of Rome to the gates of Florence. But he soon grew plump again, and merry, and his love for Lolo was yet greater than before.

By the winter all the family went to live on an estate near Spezia that the English gentleman had purchased, and there Moufflou was happier than ever. The little English boy is gaining strength in the soft air, and he and Lolo are great friends, and play with Moufflou and the poodle puppy half the day upon the sunny terraces and under the green orange boughs. Tasso is one of the gardeners there; he will have to serve as a soldier probably in some category or another, but he is safe for the time, and is happy. Lolo, whose lameness will always exempt him from military service, when he grows to be a man means to be a florist, and a great one. He has learned to read, as the first step on the road of his ambition.

“But oh, Moufflou, how *did* you find your way home?” he asks the dog a hundred times a week.

How indeed!

No one ever knew how Moufflou had made that long journey on foot, so many weary miles; but beyond a doubt he had done it alone and unaided, for if any one had helped him they would have come home with him to claim the reward.

And that you may not wonder too greatly at Moufflou's miraculous journey on his four bare feet, I will add here two facts known to friends of mine, of whose truthfulness there can be no doubt.

One concerns a French poodle who was purchased in Paris by the friend of my friend, and brought all the way from Paris to Milan by train. In a few days after his arrival in Milan the poodle was missing; and nothing more was heard or known of him until many weeks later his quondam owner in Paris, on opening his door one morning, found the dog stretched dying on the threshold of his old home.

That is one fact; not a story, mind you, *a fact*.

The other is related to me by an Italian nobleman, who in his youth belonged to the Guardia Nobile of Tuscany. That brilliant corps of elegant gentlemen owned a regimental pet, a poodle also, a fine merry and handsome dog of its kind; and the officers all loved and made much of him, except, alas! the commandant of the regiment, who hated him, because when the officers were on parade or riding in escort the poodle was sure to be jumping and frisking about in front of them. It is difficult to see where the harm of this was, but this odious old martinet vowed ven-

geance against the dog, and, being of course all powerful in his own corps, ordered the exile from Florence of the poor fellow. He was sent to a farm at Prato, twenty miles off, along the hills; but very soon he found his way back to Florence. He was then sent to Leghorn, forty miles off, but in a week's time had returned to his old comrades. He was then, by order of his unrelenting foe, shipped to the island of Sardinia. How he did it no one ever could tell, for he was carried safely to Sardinia and placed inland there in kind custody, but in some wonderful way the poor dog must have found out the sea and hidden himself on board a returning vessel, for in a month's time from his exile to the island he was back again among his comrades in Florence. Now, what I have to tell you almost breaks my heart to say, and will, I think, quite break yours to hear: alas! the brute of a commandant, untouched by such marvellous cleverness and faithfulness, was his enemy to the bitter end, and, in inexorable hatred, *had him shot!* Oh, when you grow to manhood and have power, use it with tenderness!

LAMPBLACK

LAMPBLACK

A POOR black paint lay very unhappy in its tube one day alone, having tumbled out of an artist's color-box and lying quite unnoticed for a year. "I am only Lampblack," he said to himself. "The master never looks at me: he says I am heavy, dull, lustreless, useless. I wish I could cake and dry up and die, as poor Flakewhite did when he thought she turned yellow and deserted her."

But Lampblack could not die; he could only lie in his tin tube and pine, like a silly, sorrowful thing as he was, in company with some broken bits of charcoal and a rusty palette-knife. The master never touched him; month after month passed by, and he was never thought of; the other paints had all their turn of fair fortune, and went out into the world to great academies and mighty palaces, transfigured and rejoicing in a thousand beautiful shapes and services. But Lampblack was always passed over as dull and coarse, which indeed he was, and knew himself to be so, poor fellow, which made it all the worse. "You are only a deposit!" said the other colors

to him; and he felt that it was disgraceful to be a deposit, though he was not quite sure what it meant.

“If only I were happy like the others!” thought poor, sooty Lampblack, sorrowful in his corner. “There is Bistre, now, he is not so very much better-looking than I am, and yet they can do nothing without him, whether it is a girl’s face or a wimple in a river!”

The others were all so happy in this beautiful, bright studio, whose open casements were hung with myrtle and passion-flower, and whose silence was filled with the singing of nightingales. Cobalt, with a touch or two, became the loveliness of summer skies at morning; the Lakes and Carmines bloomed in a thousand exquisite flowers and fancies; the Chromes and Ochres (mere dull earths) were allowed to spread themselves in sheets of gold that took the shine of the sun into the darkest places; Umber, a sombre and gloomy thing, could lurk yet in a child’s curls and laugh in a child’s smiles; whilst all the families of the Vermilions, the Blues, the Greens, lived in a perpetual glory of sunset or sunrise, of ocean waves or autumn woods, of kingly pageant or of martial pomp.

It was very hard. Poor Lampblack felt as

if his very heart would break, above all when he thought of pretty little Rose Madder, whom he loved dearly, and who never would even look at him, because she was so very proud, being herself always placed in nothing less than rosy clouds, or the hearts of roses, or something as fair and spiritual.

“I am only a wretched deposit!” sighed Lampblack, and the rusty palette-knife grumbled back, “My own life has been ruined in cleaning dirty brushes, and see what the gratitude of men and brushes is!”

“But at least you have been of use once; but I never am—never!” said Lampblack, wearily; and indeed he had been there so long that the spiders had spun their silver fleeces all about him, and he was growing as gray as an old bottle does in a dark cellar.

At that moment the door of the studio opened, and there came a flood of light, and the step of a man was heard: the hearts of all the colors jumped for joy, because the step was that of their magician, who out of mere common clays and ground ores could raise them at a touch into splendors of the gods and divinities immortal.

Only the heart of poor dusty Lampblack could not beat a throb the more, because he was always

left alone and never was thought worthy even of a glance. He could not believe his senses when this afternoon—oh, miracle and ecstasy!—the step of the master crossed the floor to the obscured corner where he lay under his spiders' webs, and the hand of the master touched him. Lampblack felt sick and faint with rapture. Had recognition come at last?

The master took him up: "You will do for this work," he said; and Lampblack was borne trembling to an easel. The colors, for once in their turn neglected, crowded together to watch, looking in their bright tin tubes like rows of little soldiers in armor.

"It is the old dull Deposit," they murmured to one another, and felt contemptuous, yet were curious, as scornful people often will be.

"But I am going to be glorious and great," thought Lampblack, and his heart swelled high; for never more would they be able to hurl the name of Deposit at him, a name which hurt him none the less, but all the more indeed, because it was unintelligible.

"You will do for this work," said the master, and let Lampblack out of his metal prison-house into the light and touched him with the brush that was the wand of magic.



"OLD DEPOSIT IS GOING TO BE A SIGN-POST," THEY CRIED

“What am I going to be?” wondered Lampblack, as he felt himself taken on to a large piece of deal board, so large that he felt he must be going to make the outline of an athlete or the shadows of a tempest at the least.

Himself he could not tell what he was becoming: he was happy enough and grand enough only to be employed, and, as he was being used, began to dream a thousand things of all the scenes he would be in, and all the hues that he would wear, and all the praise that he would hear when he went out into that wonderful great world of which his master was an idol. From his secret dreams he was harshly roused; all the colors were laughing and tittering round him till the little tin helmets they wore shook with their merriment.

“Old Deposit is going to be a sign-post,” they cried to one another so merrily that the spiders, who are not companionable creatures, felt themselves compelled to come to the doors of their dens and chuckle, too. A sign-post! Lampblack, stretched out in an ecstasy upon the board, roused himself shivering from his dreams, and gazed at his own metamorphosis. He had been made into seven letters, thus:

B A N D I T A .

This word in the Italian country, where the English painter's studio was, means, Do not trespass, do not shoot, do not show yourself here: anything, indeed, that is peremptory and uncivil to all trespassers. In these seven letters, outspread upon the board, was Lampblack crucified!

Farewell, ambitious hopes and happy dreams! He had been employed to paint a sign-board, a thing stoned by the boys, blown on by the winds, gnawed by the rats, and drenched with the winter's rains. Better the dust and the cobwebs of his old corner than such a shame as this!

But help was there none. His fate was fixed. He was dried with a drench of turpentine, hastily clothed in a coat of copal, and, ere he yet was fully aware of all his misery, was being borne away upon the great board out of doors and handed to the gardener. For the master was a hasty and ardent man, and had been stung into impatience by the slaughter of some favorite blue thrushes in his ilex-trees that day, and so in his haste had chosen to do journeyman's work himself. Lampblack was carried out of the studio for the last time, and as the door closed on him he heard all the colors laughing, and the laugh of little Rose Madder was highest of all as she cried

to Naples Yellow, who was a dandy and made court to her, "Poor old ugly Deposit! He will grumble to the owls and the bats now!"

The door shut, shutting him out forever from all that joyous company and palace of fair visions, and the rough hands of the gardener grasped him and carried him to the edge of the great garden, where the wall overlooked the public road, and there fastened him up on high with a band of iron round the trunk of a tree.

That night it rained heavily, and the north wind blew, and there was thunder also. Lamp-black, out in the storm without his tin house to shelter him, felt that of all creatures wretched on the face of the earth there was not one so miserable as he.

A sign-board! Nothing but a sign-board!

The degradation of a color, created for art and artists, could not be deeper or more grievous anywhere. Oh, how he sighed for his tin tube and the quiet nook with the charcoal and the palette-knife!

He had been unhappy there indeed, but still had had always some sort of hope to solace him,—some chance still remaining that one day fortune might smile and he be allowed to be at least the lowest stratum of some immortal work.

But now hope was there none. His doom, his end, were fixed and changeless. Nevermore could he be anything but what he was; and change there could be none till weather and time should have done their work on him, and he be rotting on the wet earth, a shattered and worm-eaten wreck.

Day broke,—a gloomy, misty morning.

From where he was crucified upon the tree-trunk he could no longer even see his beloved home, the studio: he could only see a dusky, intricate tangle of branches all about him, and below the wall of flint, with the Banksia that grew on it, and the hard, muddy highway, drenched from the storm of the night.

A man passed in a miller's cart, and stood up and swore at him, because the people had liked to come and shoot and trap the birds of the master's wooded gardens, and knew that they must not do it now.

A slug crawled over him, and a snail also. A woodpecker hammered at him with its strong beak. A boy went by under the wall and threw stones at him, and called him names. The rain poured down again heavily. He thought of the happy painting-room, where it had seemed always summer and always sunshine, and where

now in the forenoon all the colors were marshaling in the pageantry of the Arts, as he had seen them do hundreds of times from his lone corner. All the misery of the past looked happiness now.

"If I were only dead, like Flakewhite," he thought; but the stones only bruised, they did not kill him: and the iron band only hurt, it did not stifle him. For whatever suffers very much, has always so much strength to continue to exist. And almost his loyal heart blasphemed and cursed the master who had brought him to such a fate as this.

The day grew apace, and noon went by, and with it the rain passed. The sun shone out once more, and Lampblack, even imprisoned and wretched as he was, could not but see how beautiful the wet leaves looked, and the gossamers all hung with rain-drops, and the blue sky that shone through the boughs; for he had not lived with a great artist all his days to be blind, even in pain, to the loveliness of nature. The sun came out, and with it some little brown birds tripped out too,—very simple and plain in their costumes and ways, but which Lampblack knew were the loves of the poets, for he had heard the master call them so many times in summer nights. The little brown birds came tripping and peck-

ing about on the grass underneath his tree-trunk, and then flew on the top of the wall, which was covered with Banksia and many other creepers. The brown birds sang a little song, for though they sing most in the moonlight they do sing by day, too, and sometimes all day long. And what they sung was this:

“ Oh, how happy we are, how happy! No nets dare now be spread for us, no cruel boys dare climb, and no cruel shooters fire. We are safe, quite safe, and the sweet summer has begun!”

Lampblack listened, and even in his misery was touched and soothed by the tender liquid sounds that these little throats poured out among the light-yellow bloom of the Banksia flowers. And when one of the brown birds came and sat on a branch by him, swaying itself and drinking the rain-drops off a leaf, he ventured to ask, as well as he could for the iron that strangled him, why they were so safe, and what made them so happy.

The bird look at him in surprise.

“Do you not know?” he said. “It is *you!*”

“I!” echoed Lampblack, and could say no more, for he feared that the bird was mocking him, a poor, silly, rusty black paint, only spread out to rot in fair weather and foul. What good could he do to any creature?



“ THEN THE MASTER KNEW BEST,” THOUGHT LAMPBLACK.

“You,” repeated the nightingale. “Did you not see that man under the wall? He had a gun; we should have been dead but for you. We will come and sing to you all night long, since you like it; and when we go to bed at dawn, I will tell my cousins the thrushes and merles to take our places, so that you shall hear somebody singing near you all the day long.”

Lampblack was silent.

His heart was too full to speak.

Was it possible that he was of use, after all?

“Can it be true?” he said, timidly.

“Quite true,” said the nightingale.

“Then the master knew best,” thought Lampblack.

Never would he adorn a palace or be adored upon an altar. His high hopes were all dead, like last year’s leaves. The colors in the studio had all the glories of the world, but he was of use in it, after all; he could save these little lives. He was poor and despised, bruised by stones and drenched by storms; yet was he content, nailed there upon his tree, for he had not been made quite in vain.

The sunset poured its red and golden splendors through the darkness of the boughs, and the birds sang all together, shouting for joy and praising God.

THE AMBITIOUS ROSE-TREE



THE AMBITIOUS ROSE-TREE

SHE was a Quatre Saison Rose-tree.

She lived in a beautiful old garden with some charming magnolias for neighbors: they rather overshadowed her, certainly, because they were so very great and grand; but then such shadow as that is preferable, as every one knows, to a mere vulgar enjoyment of common daylight, and then the beetles went most to the magnolia-blossoms, for being so great and grand of course they got very much preyed upon, and this was a vast gain for the rose that was near them. She herself leaned against the wall of an orange-house, in company with a Banksia, a buoyant, active, simple-minded thing, for whom Rosa Damascena, who thought herself much better born than these climbers, had a natural contempt. Banksiæ will flourish and be content anywhere, they are such easily-pleased creatures; and when you cut them they thrive on it, which shows a very plebeian and pachydermatous temper; and they laugh all over in the face of an April day, shaking their little golden clusters of blossom in such a merry way that the Rose-tree, who was herself very reserved and thorny,

had really scruples about speaking to them.

For she was by nature extremely proud—much prouder than her lineage warranted—and a hard fate had fixed her to the wall of an orangery, where hardly anybody ever came, except the gardener and his men to carry the oranges in in winter and out in spring, or water and tend them while they were housed there.

She was a handsome rose, and she knew it. But the garden was so crowded—like the world—that she could not get herself noticed in it. In vain was she radiant and red close on to Christmas-time as in the fullest heats of midsummer. Nobody thought about her or praised her. She pined and was very unhappy.

The Banksiæ, who are little, frank, honest-hearted creatures, and say out what they think, as such plebeian people will, used to tell her roundly she was thankless for the supreme excellence of her lot.

“You have everything the soul of a rose can wish for: a splendid old wall with no nasty chinks in it; a careful gardener, who nips all the larvæ in the bud before they can do you any damage; sun, water, care; above all, nobody ever cuts a single blossom off you! What more can you wish for? This orangery is paradise!”

She did not answer.

What wounded her pride so deeply was just this fact, that they never *did* cut off any of her blossoms. When day after day, year after year, she crowned herself with her rich crimson glory and no one ever came nigh to behold or to gather it, she could have died with vexation and humiliation.

Would nobody see she was worth anything?

The truth was that in this garden there was such an abundance of very rare roses that a common though beautiful one like Rosa Damascena remained unthought of; she was lovely, but then there were so many lovelier still, or, at least, much more *à la mode*.

In the secluded garden-corner she suffered all the agonies of a pretty woman in the great world, who is only a pretty woman, and no more. It needs so *very* much more to be "somebody." To be somebody was what Rosa Damascena sighed for, from rosy dawn to rosier sunset.

From her wall she could see across the green lawns, the great parterre which spread before the house terrace, and all the great roses that bloomed there—Her Majesty Gloire de Dijon, who was a reigning sovereign born, the royally-

born Niphétos, the Princesse Adelaïde, the Comtesse Ouvaroff, the Vicomtesse de Cazes all in gold, Madame de Sombreuil in snowy white, the beautiful Louise de Savoie, the exquisite Duchess of Devonensis—all the roses that were great ladies in their own right, and as far off from her as were the stars that hung in heaven. Rosa Damascena would have given all her brilliant carnation hues to be pale and yellow like the Princesse Adelaïde, or delicately colorless like Her Grace of Devonensis.

She tried all she could to lose her own warm blushes, and prayed that bees might sting her and so change her hues; but the bees were of low taste, and kept their pearl-powder and rouge and other pigments for the use of common flowers, like the evening primrose or the buttercup and borage, and never came near to do her any good in arts of toilet.

One day the gardener approached and stood and looked at her: then all at once she felt a sharp stab in her from his knife, and a vivid pain ran downward through her stem.

She did not know it, but gardeners and gods “this way grant prayer.”

“Has not something happened to me?” she asked of the little Banksia; for she felt very odd



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all over her; and when you are unwell you cannot be very haughty.

The saucy Banksiæ laughed, running over their wires that they cling to like little children.

“You have got your wish,” they said. “You are going to be a great lady; they have made you into a *Rosa Indica*!”

A tea-rose! Was it possible?

Was she going to belong at last to that grand and graceful order, which she had envied so long and vainly from afar?

Was she, indeed, no more mere simple *Rosa Damascena*? She felt so happy she could hardly breathe. She thought it was her happiness that stifled her; in real matter of fact it was the tight bands in which the gardener had bound her.

“Oh, what joy!” she thought, though she still felt very uncomfortable, but not for the world would she ever have admitted it to the Banksiæ.

The gardener had tied a tin tube on to her, and it was heavy and cumbersome; but no doubt, she said, to herself, the thing was fashionable, so she bore the burden of it very cheerfully.

The Banksiæ asked her how she felt; but she would not deign even to reply; and when a friendly blackbird, who had often picked grubs off her leaves, came and sang to her, she kept

silent: a *Rosa Indica* was far above a blackbird.

“Next time you want a caterpillar taken away, he may eat you for *me!*” said the blackbird, and flew off in a huff.

She was very ungrateful to hate the blackbird so, for he had been most useful to her in doing to death all the larvæ of worms and beetles and caterpillars and other destroyers which were laid treacherously within her leaves. The good blackbird, with many another feathered friend, was forever at work in some good deed of the kind, and all the good, grateful flowers loved him and his race. But to this terribly proud and discontented *Rosa Damascena* he had been a bore, a common creature, a nuisance, a monster—any one of these things by turns, and sometimes all of them altogether. She used to long for the cat to get him.

“You ought to be such a happy rose!” the merle had said to her, one day. “There is no rose so strong and healthy as you are, except the briars.”

And from that day she had hated him. The idea of naming those hedgerow brier roses in the same breath with her!

You would have seen in that moment of her rage a very funny sight had you been there;

nothing less funny than a rose-tree trying to box a blackbird's ears!

But, to be sure, you would only have thought the wind was blowing about the rose, so you would have seen nothing really of the drollery of it all, which was not droll at all to *Rosa Damascena*, for a wound in one's vanity is as long healing as a wound from a conical bullet in one's body. The blackbird had not gone near her after that, nor any of his relations and friends, and she had had a great many shooting and flying pains for months together, in consequence of aphides' eggs having been laid inside her stem—eggs of which the birds would have eased her long before if they had not been driven away by her haughty rage.

However, she had been almost glad to have some ailment. She had called it aneurism, and believed it made her look refined and interesting. If it would only have made her pale! But it had not done that: she had remained of the richest rose color.

When the winter had passed and the summer had come round again, the grafting had done its work: she was really a *Rosa Indica*, and timidly put forth the first blossom in her new estate. It was a small, rather puny yellowish thing, not to

be compared to her own natural red clusters, but she thought it far finer.

Scarcely had it been put forth by her than the gardener whipped it off with his knife, and bore it away in proof of his success in such transmutations.

She had never felt the knife before, when she had been only *Rosa Damascena*: it hurt her very much, and her heart bled.

“Il faut souffrir pour être belle,” said the *Banksiæ* in a good-natured effort at consolation. She was not going to answer them, and she made believe that her tears were only dew, though it was high noon and all the dew-drops had been drunk by the sun, who by noon-time gets tired of climbing and grows thirsty.

Her next essay was much finer, and the knife whipped that off also. That summer she bore more and more blossoms, and always the knife cut them away, for she had been made one of the great race of *Rosa Indica*.

Now, a rose-tree, when a blossom is chopped or broken off, suffers precisely as we human mortals do if we lose a finger; but the rose-tree, being a much more perfect and delicate handiwork of nature than any human being, has a faculty we have not: it lives and has a sentient soul in every

one of its roses, and whatever one of these endures the tree entire endures also by sympathy. You think this very wonderful? Not at all. It is no whit more wonderful than that a lizard's tail chopped off runs about by itself, or that a dog can scent a foe or a thief whilst the foe or the thief is yet miles away. All these things are most wonderful, or not at all so—just as you like.

In a little while she bore another child: this time it was a fine fair creature, quite perfect in its hues and shapes. "I never saw a prettier!" said an emperor butterfly, pausing near for a moment; at that moment the knife of the gardener severed the rosebud's stalk.

"The lady wants one for her bouquet de corsage: she goes to the opera to-night," the man said to another man, as he took the young tea-rose.

"What is the opera?" asked the mother-rose wearily of the butterfly. He did not know; but his cousin the death's-head moth, asleep under a magnolia-leaf, looked down with a grim smile on his quaint face.

"It is where everything dies in ten seconds," he answered. "It is a circle of fire; many friends of mine have flown in, none ever returned: your daughter will shrivel up and perish miserably. One pays for glory."

The rose-tree shivered through all her stalks ; but she was still proud, and tried to think that all this was said only out of envy. What should an old death's-head moth know, whose eyes were so weak that a farthing rushlight blinded them ?

So she lifted herself a little higher, and would not even see that the Banksiæ were nodding to her ; and as for her old friend the blackbird, how vulgar he looked, bobbing up and down hunting worms and woodlice ! could anything be more outrageously vulgar than that staring yellow beak of his ? She twisted herself round not to see him, and felt quite annoyed that he went on and sang just the same, unconscious of, or indifferent to, her coldness.

With each successive summer *Rosa Damascena* became more integrally and absolutely a *Rosa Indica*, and suffered in proportion to her fashion and fame.

True, people came continually to look at her, and especially in May-time would cry aloud, "What a beautiful *Niphétos* !" But then she was bereaved of all her offspring, for, being of the race of *Niphétos*, they were precious, and one would go to die in an hour in a hot ball-room, and another to perish in a *Sèvres* vase, where the china indeed was exquisite but the water was

foul, and others went to be suffocated in the vicious gases of what the mortals call an opera-box, and others were pressed to death behind hard diamonds in a woman's bosom; in one way or another they each and all perish miserably. She herself also lost many of her once luxuriant leaves, and had a little scanty foliage, red-brown in summer, instead of the thick, dark-green clothing that she had worn when a rustic maiden. Not a day passed but the knife stabbed her; when the knife had nothing to take she was barren and chilly, for she had lost the happy power of looking beautiful all the year round, which once she had possessed.

One day came when she was taken up out of the ground and borne into a glass house, placed in a large pot, and lifted up on to a pedestal, and left in a delicious atmosphere, with patrician plants all around her with long Latin names, and strange, rare beauties of their own. She bore bud after bud in this crystal temple, and became a very crown of blossom; and her spirit grew so elated, and her vanity so supreme, that she ceased to remember she had ever been a simple *Rosa Damascena*, except that she was always saying to herself, "How great I am! how great I am!" which she might have noticed that those born

ladies, the *Devoniensis* and the *Louise de Savoie*, never did. But she noticed nothing except her own beauty, which she could see in a mirror that was let into the opposite wall of the greenhouse. Her blossoms were many and all quite perfect, and no knife touched them; and though to be sure she was still very scantily clothed so far as foliage went, yet she was all the more fashionable for that, so what did it matter?

One day, when her beauty was at its fullest perfection, she heard all the flowers about her bending and whispering with rustling and murmuring, saying, "Who will be chosen? who will be chosen?"

Chosen for what?

They did not talk much to her, because she was but a new-comer and a parvenu, but she gathered from them in a little time that there was to be a ball for a marriage festivity at the house to which the greenhouse was attached. Each flower wondered if it would be chosen to go to it. The azaleas knew they would go, because they were in their pink or rose ball-dresses all ready; but no one else was sure. The rose-tree grew quite sick and faint with hope and fear. Unless she went, she felt that life was not worth the living. She had no idea what a ball might be,

but she knew that it was another form of greatness, when she was all ready, too, and so beautiful!

The gardener came and sauntered down the glass house, glancing from one to another. The hearts of all beat high. The azaleas only never changed color: they were quite sure of themselves. Who could do without them in February?

“Oh, take me! take me! take me!” prayed the rose-tree, in her foolish, longing, arrogant heart.

Her wish was given her. The lord of their fates smiled when he came to where she stood.

“This shall be for the place of honor,” he murmured, and he lifted her out of the large vase she lived in on to a trestle and summoned his boys to bear her away. The very azaleas themselves grew pale with envy.

As for the rose-tree herself, she would not look at any one; she was carried through the old garden straight past the *Banksiæ*, but she would make them no sign; and as for the blackbird, she hoped a cat had eaten him! Had he not known her as *Rosa Damascena*?

She was borne bodily, roots and all, carefully wrapped up in soft matting, and taken into the great house.

It was a very great house, a very grand house, and there was to be a marvellous feast in it, and

a prince and princess from over the seas were that night to honor the mistress of it by their presence. All this Rosa Indica had gathered from the chatter of the flowers, and when she came into the big palace she saw many signs of excitement and confusion: servants out of livery were running up against one another in their hurry-scurry; miles and miles, it seemed, of crimson carpeting were being unrolled all along the terrace and down the terrace steps, since by some peculiar but general impression royal personages are supposed not to like to walk upon anything else, though myself I think they must get quite sick of red carpet, seeing so very much of it spread for them wherever they go. To Rosa Indica, however, the bright scarlet carpeting looked very handsome, and seemed, indeed, a foretaste of heaven.

Soon she was carried quite inside the house, into an immense room with a beautiful dome-shaped ceiling, painted in fresco three centuries before, and fresh as though it had been painted yesterday. At the end of the room was a great chair, gilded and painted, too, three centuries before, and covered with velvet, gold-fringed and powdered with golden grasshoppers. "That common insect here!" thought Rosa, in surprise,

for she did not know that the chief of the house, long, long, long ago, when sleeping in the heat of noon in Palestine in the first crusade, had been awakened by a grasshopper lighting on his eyelids, and so had been aroused in time to put on his armor and do battle with a troop of attacking Saracen cavalry, and beat them; wherefore, in gratitude, he had taken the humble field-creature as his badge for evermore.

They set the roots of *Rosa Indica* now into a vase—such a vase! the royal blue of Sèvres, if you please, and with border and scroll work and all kinds of wonders and glories painted on it and gilded on it, and standing four feet high if it stood one inch! I could never tell you the feelings of *Rosa* if I wrote a thousand pages. Her heart thrilled so with ecstasy that she almost dropped all her petals, only her vanity came to her aid, and helped her to control in a measure her emotions. The gardeners broke off a good deal of mould about her roots, and they muttered one to another something about her dying of it. But *Rosa* thought no more of that than a pretty lady does when her physician tells her she will die of tight lacing; not she! She was going to be put into that Sèvres vase.

This was enough for her, as it is enough for

the lady that she is going to be put into a hundred-guinea ball-gown.

In she went. It was certainly a tight fit, as the gown often is, and Rosa felt nipped, strained, bruised, suffocated. But an old proverb has settled long ago that pride feels no pain, and perhaps the more foolish the pride the less is the pain that is felt—for the moment.

They set her well into the vase, putting green moss over her roots, and then they stretched her branches out over a gilded trellis-work at the back of the vase. And very beautiful she looked; and she was at the head of the room, and a huge mirror down at the farther end opposite to her showed her own reflection. She was in paradise!

“At last,” she thought to herself, “at last they have done me justice!”

The azaleas were all crowded round underneath her, like so many kneeling courtiers, but they were not taken out of their pots; they were only shrouded in moss. They had no Sèvres vases. And they had always thought so much of themselves and given themselves such airs, for there is nothing so vain as an azalea—except, indeed, a camellia, which is the most conceited flower in the world, though, to do it justice, it is also the most industrious, for it is busy getting

ready its next winter buds whilst the summer is still hot and broad on the land, which is very wise and prudent in it and much to be commended.

Well, there was Rosa Indica at the head of the room in the Sèvres vase, and very proud and triumphant she felt throned there, and the azaleas, of course, were whispering enviously underneath her, "Well, after all, she was only Rosa Damascena not so *very* long ago."

Yes, *they knew!* What a pity it was! They knew she had once been Rosa Damascena and never would wash it out of their minds—the tiresome, spiteful, malignant creatures!

Even aloft in the vase, in all her glory, the rose could have shed tears of mortification, and was ready to cry, like Themistocles, "Can nobody give us oblivion?"

Nobody could give that, for the azaleas, who were so irritated at being below her, were not at all likely to hold their tongues. But she had great consolations and triumphs, and began to believe that, let them say what they chose, she had never been a common garden-wall rose. The ladies of the house came in and praised her to the skies; the children ran up to her and clapped their hands and shouted for joy at her beauty; a wonderful big green bird came in and hopped before

her, cocked his head on one side, and said to her, "Pretty Poll! oh, *such* a pretty Poll!"

"Even the birds adore me here!" she thought, not dreaming he was only talking of himself; for when you are as vain as was this poor dear Rosa, creation is pervaded with your own perfections, and even when other people say only "Poll!" you feel sure they are saying "You!" or they ought to be if they are not.

So there she stood in her grand Sèvres pot, and she was ready to cry with the poet, "The world may end to-night!" Alas! it was not the world which was to end. Let me hasten to close this true heart-rending history.

There was a great dinner as the sun began to set, and the mistress of the house came in on the arm of the great foreign prince; and what did the foreign prince do but look up at Rosa, straight up at her, and over the heads of the azaleas, and say to his hostess, "What a beautiful rose you have there! A Niphétos, is it not?"

And her mistress, who had known her long as simple Rosa Damascena, answered, "Yes, sir; it is a Niphétos."

Oh to have lived for that hour! The silly thing thought it worth all her suffering from the



"PRETTY POLL! OH, SUCH A PRETTY POLL!"

gardener's knife, all the loss of her robust health and delightful power of flowering in all four seasons. She was a Niphétos, really and truly a Niphétos! and not one syllable hinted as to her origin! She began to believe she had been *born* a tea-rose!

The dinner was long and gorgeous; the guests were dazzling in jewels and in decorations; the table was loaded with old plate and rare china; the prince made a speech and used her as a simile of love and joy and purity and peace. The rose felt giddy with triumph and with the fumes of the wines around her. Her vase was of purple and gold, and all the voices round her said, "Oh, the beautiful rose!" No one noticed the azaleas. How she wished that the blackbird could see for a minute, if the cat would gobble him up the next!

The day sped on; the châtelaine and her guests went away; the table was rearranged; the rose-tree was left in its place of honor; the lights were lit; there was the sound of music near at hand; they were dancing in other chambers.

Above her hung a chandelier—a circle of innumerable little flames and drops that looked like dew or diamonds. She thought it was the sun come very close. After it had been there a

little while it grew very hot, and its rays hurt her.

“Can you not go a little farther away, O Sun?” she said to it. It was flattered at being taken for the sun, but answered her, “I am fixed in my place. Do you not understand astronomy?”

She did not know what astronomy was, so was silent, and the heat hurt her. Still, she was in the place of honor: so she was happy.

People came and went; but nobody noticed her. They ate and drank, they laughed and made love, and then went away to dance again, and the music went on all night long, and all night long the heat of the chandelier poured down on her.

“I am in the place of honor,” she said to herself a thousand times in each hour.

But the heat scorched her, and the fumes of the wines made her faint. She thought of the sweet fresh air of the old garden where the Banksiæ were. The garden was quite near, but the windows were closed, and there were the walls now between her and it. She was in the place of honor. But she grew sick and waxed faint as the burning rays of the artificial light shining above her seemed to pierce through and through her like lances of steel. The night seemed very long. She was tired.

She was erect there on her Sèvres throne, with the light thrilling and throbbing upon her in every point. But she thought of the sweet, dark, fresh nights in the old home where the blackbird had slept, and she longed for them.

The dancers came and went, the music thrummed and screamed, the laughter was both near and far; the rose-tree was amidst it all. Yet she felt alone—all alone! as travellers may feel in a desert. Hour succeeded hour; the night wore on apace; the dancers ceased to come; the music ceased, too; the light still burned down upon her, and the scorching fever of it consumed her like fire.

Then there came silence—entire silence. Servants came round and put out all the lights—hundreds and hundreds of lights—quickly one by one. Other servants went to the windows and threw them wide open to let out the fumes of wine. Without, the night was changing into the gray that tells of earliest dawn. But it was a bitter frost; the grass was white with it; the air was ice. In the great darkness that had now fallen on all the scene this deadly cold came around the rose-tree and wrapped her in it as in a shroud.

She shivered from head to foot.

The true glacial coldness crept into the hot banqueting-chamber, and moved round it in white, misty circles, like steam, like ghosts of the gay guests that had gone. All was dark and chill—dark and chill as any grave!

What worth was the place of honor now?

Was this the place of honor?

The rose-tree swooned and drooped! A servant's rough hand shook down its worn beauty into a heap of fallen leaves. When they carried her out dead in the morning, the little Banksia-buds, safe hidden from the frost within their stems, waiting to come forth when the summer should come, murmured to one another:

“She had her wish; she was great. This way the gods grant foolish prayers, and punish discontent!”

